

## INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE  
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON  
THE MISSOURI PACIFIC RAILROAD AT SYRACUSE, MO.,  
ON NOVEMBER 17, 1924.

December 8, 1924.

To the Commission:

On November 17, 1924, there was a head-end collision between two passenger trains on the Missouri Pacific Railroad at Syracuse, Mo., which resulted in the death of 1 employee, and the injury of 33 passengers, 4 employees and 2 persons carried under contract.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Sedalia District of the Eastern Division, which extends between Jefferson City and RockCreek Junction, Mo., a distance of 151.51 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and a manual block-signal system. The point of accident was a short distance east of the west passing-track switch, approaching from the west there is a compound curve to the right 1,123 feet in length with a maximum curvature of  $2^{\circ} 57'$ , then a tangent 118 feet in length and a  $3^{\circ}$  curve to the left 2,105 feet in length, the accident occurring on the last-mentioned curve at a point about 450 feet from its western end. The grade is ascending for eastbound trains, varying from 0.75 to 1.15 per cent.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at 3.34 a.m.

Description

Westbound passenger train No. 13 consisted of three mail cars, two baggage cars, one coach, one chair car, and four Pullman sleeping cars, hauled by engine 6452, and was in charge of Conductor Lawrence and Engineer Deimert. The fourth, fifth, tenth, and eleventh cars were of steel underframe construction, while the balance were of all-steel construction. At Jefferson City the crew in charge received a copy of train order No. 6, Form 19, directing them to hold the main track

and meet train second No. 20 at Syracuse, which is 42.8 miles from Jefferson City. At Tipton, the last open block office, 5.47 miles from Syracuse, the crew received a block-signal permissive card calling attention to the meet at Syracuse and also a clearance card. Train No. 13 left Tipton at 3.40 a.m. and stopped on the main track at Syracuse, clear of the west switch, at about 3.30 a.m., and it was standing at this point when it was struck by train second No. 20.

Eastbound passenger train second No. 20 consisted of one baggage car, one combination baggage and express car, one chair car, and two sleeping cars, hauled by engine 6445, and was in charge of Conductor Meyer and Engineman Ogan. The second car was of wooden construction and the last car of all-steel construction, while the others had steel underframes. At Sedalia, 20.8 miles from Syracuse, the crew received a copy of train order No. 6 previously referred to, and when passing Otterville, the last open block office, 7.61 miles west of Syracuse, the crew received a block-signal permissive card calling attention to the meet at Syracuse, together with a clearance card. Train second No. 20 failed to stop for the purpose of heading in at the west switch at Syracuse, however, and collided with train No. 13 on the main track while travelling at a speed variously estimated by the employees at from 13 to 40 miles an hour.

Both engines were partly derailed but remained upright, they were quite badly damaged. The first car in train No. 13 was telescoped a short distance by the tender of engine 6452, while the wooden baggage and express car in train second No. 20 was telescoped a distance of about 14 feet by the car immediately ahead of it. The employee killed was the engineman of train No. 13.

#### Summary of evidence

No change was made in the consist of train second No. 20 when it arrived at Sedalia, at which point Engineman Ogan took charge of the engine and received the train orders from the conductor, including train order No. 6. When departing from Sedalia he did not make a running test of the air brakes but used them to reduce speed in the yards for the purpose of letting off the engineman who had handled the engine from Kansas City to Sedalia. No stops were made en route to Syracuse, but when passing Otterville, Engineman Ogan reduced the speed on the descending grade at that point for the purpose of picking up the block-signal permissive card and

clearance card. Approaching Syracuse he sounded the whistle at the station mile board, following this with the meeting-point whistle signal, but did not apply the brakes at the mile board as is required by rule when approaching a meeting point, the first application being made when about 1/2 mile from the station, while traveling at a speed he estimated to have been about 40 miles an hour. He said the brakes did not work properly and after travelling an additional distance of about 1/4 mile he placed the brake valve in the emergency position and opened the sanders. He said the brakes still failed to respond and that he then reversed the engine, but passed the west switch at a speed of 20 or 25 miles an hour and collided with train No. 13. Immediately after the occurrence of the accident he found an angle cock on the forward end of the first car to be partly closed. He said he told Fireman Boyle about it but did not mention it to any one else, not even when talking with the officials when they reached the scene, in fact, he said that in his discussion with them he freely admitted responsibility for the accident, although at the same time saying that the brakes did not seem to hold as well as they should.

Fireman Boyle said the air brakes seemed to work properly en route and he thought they were applied in service application when approaching the west switch, followed in about 45 seconds by an emergency application. This emergency application was made when he was on the deck of the engine and he at once ran to the left side to look out of the gangway and jumped just before the collision occurred. He did not know of anything wrong with the brakes but said that Engineman Ogan in his conversation after the accident seemed to think they had not worked properly.

The same train crew handled the train through from Kansas City and Conductor Meyer said the brakes were inspected before leaving that point and were reported as being all right, that they were used in making several stops en route to Sedalia, and that the train line was not broken on arriving at Sedalia. He verified the engineman's statement about reducing speed when leaving Sedalia and also when picking up the clearance and block-signal permissive cards at Ottumville. Conductor Meyer heard Engineman Ogan sound the meeting-point whistle signal approaching Syracuse, at which time the speed was about 30 or 35 miles an hour. He was on the rear platform of the third car, opened the trap door and got down on one of the steps, saw the lamp on the west switch and realized that his train was not going to stop, but before he could get inside the vestibule for the purpose of pulling the emergency cord he felt the air brakes being

applied, this being just before the train reached the switch. Sometime afterwards the engineman told him about finding an angle cock turned on one of the baggage cars. Conductor Meyer thought, however, that the brakes held properly and that the accident was due to the failure of the engineman to judge speed and distance correctly.

The statements of Flagman Dowell brought out nothing additional of importance except that he said he felt an emergency application just before the collision occurred, while afterwards the engineman told him he did not think the brakes had worked properly. Train Porter Price thought the brakes were applied in emergency just before the accident occurred.

Engineman Young, who handled engine 6445 from Kansas City to Sedalia, said the brakes worked satisfactorily at all times and that the engine was in good condition when he turned it over to Engineman Ogan at Sedalia. He also said that Engineman Ogan appeared to be in normal physical condition, which statement was verified by other witnesses who had seen and talked with Engineman Ogan prior to his departure from Sedalia.

Fireman Norsworthy, of train No. 13 was engaged in raking down coal and was unable to give any material information concerning the occurrence of the accident. Conductor Lawrence, however, said he was on one of the platforms of the sixth car in his train when he saw train second No. 20 approaching, he felt sure it would not be able to stop at the west switch and gave the engineman a stop signal. He did not see or hear anything to indicate that train second No. 20 was being brought to a stop until after he had given this signal, and from fire flying from the wheels after the brakes were applied he thought they must have been working properly. Both he and Fireman Norsworthy said Engineman Ogan afterwards told them he was responsible for the accident. Train Porter King said he and Conductor Lawrence both gave stop signals to the engineman of train second No. 20, and that it was then that the engineman shut off steam and applied the brakes.

Road Foreman of Engines Bushey said that when he reached the scene Engineman Ogan said he had misjudged the distance for the speed at which his train was running, that the engine was all right, but that the air brakes on the train did not seem to hold as well as they should have held. Mr Bushey noted at the time that the angle cocks between the engine and first car were both wide

open with the handle on the first car down in its notch. Master Mechanic Cunningham verified the statements of Road Foreman of Engines Bushey, while the statements of other officials, which were similar in their character, were to the effect that Engineman Ogan said nothing to them about finding an angle cock partly closed.

#### Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman Ogan, of train second No. 40, to have his train under proper control approaching a meeting point.

Engineman Ogan said he found the angle cock partly closed on the head end of the first car but he did not, however, show it to any one or tell the officials about it when they reached the scene. The air brakes had been tested before the train left its terminal at Kansas City, they had worked properly en route to Sedalia, and they also responded when applied as the train was leaving Sedalia and again when reducing speed on the descending grade at Ottumville, while the statements of the members of the train crew indicate that they felt the brakes being applied shortly before the occurrence of the accident. Under the circumstances it is believed that Engineman Ogan did not begin braking soon enough, due to his misjudging either the speed of his train or the distance available for bringing it to a stop.

An adequate automatic train stop or train control device would have prevented this accident.

The engine crew of train second No. 40 had been on duty about 1 hour and the train crew about 5 hours, previous to which they had been off duty 19 and 13 hours, respectively. The crew of train No. 13 had been on duty about 6 hours, after nearly 33 hours off duty.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.